

CONSTRUCTED IMAGES: THE INFLUENCES OF NEWS ORGANIZATIONS
AND SOCIALIZATION IN PHOTOJOURNALISM

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Thesis Prepared for the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

UNIVERSITY OF NORTH TEXAS

December 2001

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Bolack, Michell, Constructed images: The influences of news organizations and socialization in photojournalism. Master of Arts (Journalism), December 2001, 58 pp., references, 32 titles.

Media sociologists have produced much research on the systems of production of media content. Photojournalism, however, largely has been ignored in these studies. This paper presents the findings of an ethnographic study of work routines and photojournalism practices at three newspapers. The study explored the extent to which routines and practices are affected by professional norms and values and organizational needs and beliefs. The study also explored how these factors influence the content and aesthetic qualities of newspaper photographs. Findings suggest that photo editors and photojournalists operate under many of the same constraints as other media workers. The findings also show that photojournalists are socialized to newspapers' expectations by fellow photographers and photo editors. To gauge professional accomplishments, photojournalists rely on peers, professional organizations and competitions.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
Chapter	
1. INTRODUCTION.....	1
2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE	5
3. METHODOLOGY	13
4. FINDINGS	22
5. DISCUSSION	25
6. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH.....	48
APPENDIX A	51
APPENDIX B	54
REFERENCES	58

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Our understanding of the world is linked to visual images. With the invention of photography, ordinary people were able to see the world—from faraway lands, to the depths of the ocean, to a view of the Earth from space. Strife and struggle also were brought into our homes with the capturing of memorable images, such as the street execution of a Viet Cong suspect and a firefighter cradling the body of a tiny victim of the Oklahoma City bombing. The events recorded by photojournalists and disseminated by the mass media carry the weight of historical documents. These photographs contribute to how people know, understand and develop opinions of people, places and events they have never experienced firsthand.

Historically, photography has been considered capable of capturing reality more so than any other medium. As photography evolved as a means to record news events, historian John Werge commented in 1890, “Photography is now the historian of earth and animated nature, the biographer of man” (Carlebach, 1992, p. 59). The mission of the news photographer has been described as informing, reporting and carrying the scene to the reader (Horton, 1989). For the viewer of a news photograph, the medium delivers a message by freezing a moment in time. While the primary goal of photojournalism is to clearly communicate a message, we now know that to a certain extent photographers can control that message by influencing how their subjects are conveyed through shot selection and composition.

The creative nature of photography is inherently subjective, yet photojournalists and their audiences are reluctant to admit that recording these moments objectively may be impossible (Newton, 1996). Every day photojournalists are able to control what is presented to the public as “reality” by choosing one person, event or moment while ignoring others, making the resulting image a constructed symbolic object. Still, photographers and readers frequently view these photographs as truthful, unmediated reflections of the subject rather than images manufactured within the guidelines of professional and organizational expectations.

Beyond composition, these photographs are exposed to the constraints of producing images for a news organization. Many newspaper photographers enter the field with great passion and aspirations. They hope to inform readers through the power of visual images and inspire change by exposing social ills. However, routines in the newsroom and the desires of news organizations limit the communicative and creative autonomy of the photojournalist.

To be successful within an organization, news photographers must develop practices that allow them to produce images with the resources allowed by the newspaper. They are exposed to time constraints and must operate with the equipment and materials afforded them by the newspaper. In addition, they must produce images that meet the desires of their editors and publishers, sometimes passing up photographs they believe more effectively communicate the subject matter.

In recent years, media researchers have directed much of their attention to the newsmaking process, identifying routines, professional values and organizational

constraints that affect news content. Yet, the subjective processes that occur behind the lens often have been ignored by these researchers, even though the environment in which newspaper photographers perform their jobs impacts what readers understand as reality.

This study applies the social constructionist and organizational theoretical perspectives in examining the practices that allow news photographers at metropolitan newspapers to manage the unpredictable nature of their workday. The study attempts to examine the extent to which these practices are affected by professional norms and values and organizational needs and beliefs. The role major photojournalism contests play in how news photographers define and evaluate the quality of their work in such a complex and subjective work environment also is explored.

Using ethnographic research methods, 14 photographers and five photo editors were observed and interviewed in the newsroom and on assignment at three daily newspapers. Interviews pertaining to work routines and roles within the news organization were conducted over the course of three days at each newspaper. Observations began with the morning budget meeting, during which editors discuss the stories and art planned for each section of that day's paper, or with the assignment of photographers to the day's stories and events. The observations continued until photographers had submitted their final pictures for the next day's paper. During the interviews, photographers and editors were asked questions related to how they believe the newspaper supports or restrains their goals as photojournalists, how they evaluate their job performance and their views on the major monthly and annual photojournalism contests.

This study uncovers some of the criteria photo editors and news photographers use when assessing their ability to perform their jobs and determining the quality of their work. The study provides a better understanding of how photo editors and photographers believe they are able to attain their professional goals within the environment of the news organization. It also explores how photojournalists measure their professional accomplishments. This will in turn give a better understanding to the practices that affect the images printed in newspapers and the messages they communicate.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

While the research of media sociologists has shattered the view of other forms of journalism as a mirror on reality, the role of individual and organizational routines in the production of news photographs has been largely ignored, perhaps because of the belief that these images are less vulnerable to manipulation than words. Photographs, however, are subjected to the same system of production as other media content. Photojournalists perform their jobs in a similar environment and with many of the same constraints as other journalists.

In a discussion of the lack of visual analysis in mass media, Hansen, Cottle, Negrine & Newbold (1998) note, "...the analytical tools deployed in visual analysis remain relatively unused and undeveloped in comparison to the repertoire of methods and techniques deployed in relation to written and spoken language" (p. 189). The authors assert that by taking photographs at face value, researchers fail to interrogate the contribution of images to the construction of social meaning. In his study of professional news photographers and the images they create, David D. Perlmutter (1998) observed, "Professional photojournalists operate within structured systems and codes of form and content as much as any other media workers" (p. 26). Like other forms of journalistic communication, the images in mass media are more the result of a complex set of social and organizational factors than pictures of reality.

Beginning with David Manning White's (1950) study of journalists as "gatekeepers" and Warren Breed's (1955) research on the socialization of journalists to their jobs, an increasing number of studies have examined how factors inside and outside media organizations affect content. Social scientists have examined news production from the symbolic interactionism or social constructionist views of society, and from the organizational or bureaucratic theoretical perspective (Schudson, 1991). These studies reveal a complex, interrelated network of professional and organizational norms and identify numerous routines that affect print media and broadcast content.

Routines are defined as habitual, patterned or repeated practices that are accepted as appropriate professional norms (Shoemaker & Reese, 1996). Central to the routines approach is the belief that news is a manufactured product, not a mirror on reality. In marketing a manufactured product, news organizations must develop systems to manage the unpredictable nature of news and the infinite supply of potential news events. As media conglomerates have developed, the complexity of relationships in news organizations has increased, and news has become a commodity that must meet market demands (McManus, 1994).

Journalists are socialized into the system and develop professional values that reflect the policies of the publisher and support the organization's needs (Breed, 1955; Tuchman, 1978). These routines and values are used in determining which events become news and result in a standardization of news content across media. Herbert Gans (1979) noted that journalists "rarely make selected decisions on overtly ideological grounds; rather, they work within organizations which provide them with only a limited amount of

leeway in selection decisions, which is further reduced by their allegiance to professionally shared values” (p. 79).

Researchers have identified several common routines in the production of news. One of the earliest routines adopted by reporters was the beat system, which provided an organized method of newsgathering (Tuchman, 1978). Other routines include the classification of stories by the type of subject matter, gatekeeping, providing balanced coverage, reliance on authoritative sources, and the use of standard news values to make judgments on newsworthiness (Lowrey, 1999; Shoemaker & Reese, 1996; Tuchman, 1978). These routines aid journalists in managing organizational constraints and allow them to claim accuracy and objectivity by providing guidelines in the coverage of news events (Shoemaker & Reese, 1996).

Many of the qualities valued in print journalism have been adopted by visual journalists. Until 1880, most photographers built careers by taking studio portraits and landscape photographs. As technology advanced, so did the roles of photographers. The development of the halftone process in the early 1900s provided the means for photographs to be regularly reproduced in daily newspapers. The goal of early news photographers was to be the first on the scene and the first to get the photograph in the paper. Little knowledge or talent was required to get a job as a newspaper photographer. Copy boys often apprenticed for the position by working in the darkroom and carrying the photographers’ equipment on assignment (Kobré, 1996).

During the 1930s, news photography began a period of rapid change. The work of the Farm Security Administration photographers and the popularity of the photographic

essays in *Life* and other picture magazines expanded the scope of photojournalism. As some photographers gained recognition by the public and editors began acknowledging pictures as a means of reporting news, photographers gained respect in the newsroom (Kobré, 1996).

The National Press Photographers Association, founded in 1946, drafted a code of ethics that solidified the purpose of photojournalism to serve the public by truthfully, honestly and objectively reporting the news (Lester, 1991). Since that time, some newspapers have adopted their own codes of ethics for photojournalists that hold them to the standards of objective reporting and support freedom of the press. The Society of Professional Journalists includes guidelines for photojournalists and photo editors in its code of ethics. These guidelines include ensuring that photographs do not misrepresent, oversimplify or highlight incidents out of context (Society of Professional Journalists, 1996). With continuing improvement of photographic technology and expanding types of subjects to cover, photographers found a permanent place in newspaper organizations. “It might be said that in 1950 the photographer was a news photographer and in 1960 he or she was a photojournalist,” Frank Hoy observed (1986, p. 185).

As the role and importance of photojournalists increased, so did their goals. In 1966, Cornell Capa identified the “concerned photographers” movement in photojournalism while organizing the works of six photographers for an exhibit. The term was used to describe the works of the photographers, which had in common a concern for humankind (Chapnick, 1994). Capa founded the Fund for Concerned Photography in 1966, which later grew into the International Center of Photography. The organization

emphasizes the accurate depiction of our life and times. Capa described photojournalists recognized by the organization by stating, “They do it because they have a concern for mankind and because they believe in its importance and relevance to our times” (Chapnick, 1994, p. 24).

Along with the developments in the role of photojournalists came changes in the aesthetic ideals of photojournalism. In a study of the development of photojournalism standards, Timothy Roy Gleason (1998) found that by the mid-1950s, practices had been developed by news photographers that emphasized objectivity and resulted in simple, event-oriented photographs that could be shot on deadline and were quickly understood by editors and the audience. The traditional news values taught in journalism schools and used as guidelines in the workplace when making decisions about newspaper content are valued in photojournalism as well. Award-winning news photographs typically mimic these news values, which include prominence of the subject, conflict and controversy, timeliness, proximity, human interest and the unusual (Singletary & Lamb, 1984).

Photojournalists are socialized into the profession, and the social constraints of the work environment influence the aesthetic qualities of their photographs (Rosenblum, 1978). This environment seeks to minimize the subjective and interpretive capabilities of photojournalism and emphasizes simple, clean shots that instantly catch the reader’s eye. By following the established norms, photographers, who initially were not welcome in the newsroom, were able to gain respect among editors and reporters (Gleason, 1998). The expectations of the news photographer also have evolved from a technician to a journalist skilled as a reporter, fact gatherer, interpreter and artist (Berry, 1976).

With their increasing importance within the news organization, photographers have had to develop approaches that allow them to produce images of acceptable quality from a variety of standard news situations. The socialization of news photographers to professional and organizational demands begins in journalism textbooks, which include detailed instructions on how to photograph news events (Schwartz, 1991). These methods help aspiring news photographers learn to “previsualize” what photographs would be best from a given event (Schwartz, 1991).

Students are taught to imagine the photograph as it would appear in the newspaper. One textbook explains that by using this technique, the photographer has a better chance of capturing an image “to fit the editorial purpose with creativity and impact” (Kerns, 1980, p. 83). This technique serves professional photographers as well. Joe Elbert, assistant managing editor for photography for *The Washington Post*, commented that professional photographers apply a “preconceived formula” to routine news events knowing this will provide them with “better-than-average photos” (Kobré, 1999).

Howard Chapnick (1994), who was associated with the Black Star Photo Agency for more than 50 years and also served as its president, observed, “It is difficult for the American photojournalist to develop a distinctive look, since traditional journalistic values stress content and communication rather than style” (p. 231). Chapnick (1994) describes most newspaper photo staffs as interchangeable because they closely adhere to editorial demands for direct, unambiguous photographs with an emphasis on content and composition. The qualities that define photojournalism are determined by the nature of

the business, and photojournalists have had to adapt their ideology to meet the criteria (Becker, 1995).

Karin Becker Ohrn (1983) conducted an ethnographic study of photojournalists at three major metropolitan newspapers. In her study, she examined how photojournalists work within the organizational structure of their newspapers. Ohrn identified routines in making assignments, shooting assignments and selecting photos used for publication. She observed that, based on prior knowledge of an event, its participants and its location, photographers typically have one or more specific images in mind. The news photographers in Ohrn's study (1983) were able to describe the routines they used when approaching different types of assignments. She also found that most photographers entered regional and national contests and they valued assignments that might have the qualities of a contest winner (Ohrn, 1983).

Like reporters, photographers place assignments into categories. In photojournalism, the categories include spot news, general news, features, sports action, sports feature and portraits. These categories are included in the University of Missouri Pictures of the Year competition, NPPA monthly clip contests and The Associated Press Managing Editors photojournalism awards, among many others. Photographers follow traditional aesthetic routines as well. These include capturing peak action, including few elements in the frame and composing the elements to be graphically pleasing. By using these methods of typification, photojournalists are able to evaluate the quality of their work by placing their photographs in these categories and assessing them based on the aesthetic ideals.

The values and routines of news organizations have been proven to have profound effects on how journalists perform their jobs and on how reality is defined by the mass media. These factors have, perhaps, a greater role in determining media content than do journalists' personal values or beliefs. In their studies of news workers, David H. Weaver and G. Cleveland Wilhoit (1996) found "journalists perceived organizational context and journalistic training as the most influential factors affecting newsworthiness" (p. 151).

Understanding how photojournalists view their roles within the news organization and how they perform their jobs is important in determining how visual messages are mediated. Identifying the influences on photojournalists' professional roles and the routines necessary for efficient job performance will provide better understanding of the symbolic content of photographs. This study examines some of the complex relationships involved in daily newspaper photojournalism and how they influence photographers' attitudes and beliefs about their work in relation to past studies of reporters and editors.

The objectives of this ethnographic study were to gather information about the ways photo editors and photojournalists view routines in the workplace and how they believe the news organization that employs them supports or restricts their professional goals. A second set of objectives addressed the criteria photojournalists use to assess the quality of their work and what role photojournalism contests have in how photographers evaluate their work.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

This study examined the daily work environments and attitudes of photo editors and photographers at three metropolitan newspapers. The newspapers were the primary print media for their communities, but varied in circulation and size of the photo staffs. These newspapers provided a variety of work environments and staff members who were diverse in their perspectives based on their personal backgrounds and work experiences.

The newspapers chosen for this study were the *Dallas Morning News*, the *New Orleans Times-Picayune* and the *Albuquerque Journal*. The newspapers were selected to provide a variance in geographical location, structure of the news operation and size of the photo staff. These differences allow the information collected to be analyzed for those characteristics present in all locations and those that may be associated with a particular work environment. All three departments were large enough to include photo editors and photographers with a variety of levels of professional experience, including working for other news organizations. These ranged from a small-town newspaper in southern Illinois to the *New York Daily News*, with a weekday circulation of more than 716,000.

Ethnography is useful in discovering what people do and the reasons and meanings they give for their actions (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999). Ethnomethodological research techniques were selected for this study to provide insight into the newspaper workplace culture from the perspective of photo editors and photographers. Responses may aid in understanding the meaning photojournalists attribute to their actions and the

images they produce. Ethnography has been used for media studies when the problem is complex and embedded in multiple systems. The method has been applied to studies of news production, news values and journalistic culture, including research conducted by Breed (1955), Tuchman (1978), and Gans (1979).

Ethnography relies on participant observation and face-to-face, in-depth interviews as the principal forms of data collection (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999). Ethnographic fieldwork allows the researcher to observe, record and interpret behavior, and reflect upon the ways what is recorded affects the behavior, attitude and values of the participants (Schensul, Schensul, LeCompte, 1999). Participant observation includes exposure to and involvement in the routine daily activities of the participants within the research setting and is well-suited for the study of the operations of media organizations (Hansen et al., 1998; Priest, 1996). Interviews yield accounts of how participants define their roles within the environment, what they value and what factors influence their beliefs, behavior and relationships.

The fieldwork for this study was conducted during a period of nine days, spending three days at the downtown or main offices of each newspaper. Bureaus and regional offices were excluded from the study because of their distance from the main newsroom and differences in work environment, which could introduce additional personal and organizational issues. Using participant observation, information was gathered in the newsroom and on assignment. The physical arrangement of the work environment, scheduling and work flow, and the general resources available to staff were recorded.

The photographers and editors also were observed while carrying out job-related activities. These duties included making assignments, shooting on location and in the studio, and editing film. Notes were taken describing participants' interaction with other members of the staff, reporters and editors. Photo editors were included in the study to provide a thorough perspective of the objectives of the department, structure of the work environment, and the department's role within the news organization.

In-depth interviews were conducted with staff photographers and photo editors. A list of relevant questions addressing the objectives of the study was prepared before the visits were conducted (see Appendix A). Participants were asked to respond to the open-ended questions. Their answers led to follow-up questions related to their responses and introduced new topics for discussion. The photographers and photo editors also were asked questions about assignments and other tasks as they were being completed. In addition, information about each newspaper's circulation, size of staff, age range of staff members, and range of work experience of staff members was gathered using a survey (see Appendix B).

The goal of ethnographic research is to provide an accurate reflection of the beliefs and perspectives of the participants. Instead of synthesizing data to create a single story, current ethnographic practices include multiple voices in the results (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999). The findings of this study were collected into descriptions of responses, relationships, behaviors and beliefs related to each objective. Behaviors, beliefs and actions that appeared repeatedly at one or more of the research locations were noted.

In analyzing the data, organizational factors such as the type of newspaper ownership, organizational goals, management styles and size of photography staffs were considered. The professional backgrounds of the photographers also were used in analyzing responses. The amount of photojournalism experience and level of professional experience were noted as potential factors in photographers' beliefs and actions. Although ethnomethodological research adheres to systematic and repeatable procedures, it is important to note that observations and analyses are filtered through the researchers' interpretive frames (Schensul et al., 1999).

The theoretical framework for this study was based on previous findings of media sociologists. The theoretical perspectives developed by researchers such as Tuchman (1978) and Gans (1979) make up many of the central beliefs in the application of the social construction of reality to media organizations. These perspectives have been described as the symbolic interactionism or social constructionists' view of society and the organizational or bureaucratic theoretical perspective (Schudson, 1991).

The results of media research using these approaches have produced several concepts relevant to this study. These concepts include the idea that news is a manufactured product and news organizations must create routines to efficiently and profitably manage the unexpected. In turn, these routines determine news content and result in a standardization of what is presented to the audience as news. At the individual level, journalists abandon personal values in favor of professional values that have developed to support organizational goals. These key concepts were used in interpreting and analyzing data collected for this study.

For this research project, five photo editors were interviewed and observed.

Within the general job of photo editor, titles and duties varied.

- One editor held the title of assignment editor. He was responsible for making assignments, attending budget meetings and tracking the daily schedule.
- One editor, who held the title of director of photography, was responsible for editing the front page of the newspaper, selecting wire photos and attending budget meetings. He had the primary responsibility for administrative and managerial duties of the department and assisted in preparing photographs for press.
- One photo editor was responsible for making assignments, editing staff and wire photos, and handling administrative and managerial duties of the department. He also shot assignments an average of one day a week.
- One assistant photo editor was responsible for making assignments and editing the Metro section. She also assisted other editors with photo desk duties, including preparing photographs for press.
- One assistant photo editor shot assignments part time and was responsible for editing pre-print sections, such as the feature and food sections. He also supported the photo editors with making assignments, selecting wire photos and completing other general duties of the department.

Fourteen photographers were interviewed for the study. Of those, nine were observed during a total of 13 assignments. When possible, these photographers were observed receiving assignments for the day, shooting the assignments, and during the

editing and scanning process. Interviews were conducted between assignments and during breaks. When time allowed, additional photographers were interviewed in the newsroom, but were not accompanied on assignment.

Detailed notes were taken, and when possible, interviews were recorded. Participants were asked prepared interview questions regarding their daily work schedules and how well they believed the organizational structure of the photo department and the newspaper supported their personal work ethic and overall professional goals. Photographers also were asked how they evaluated the quality of their work and their progress in their careers. They were asked if they participate in monthly and annual photography contests and what value these contests have in assessing their work. As is characteristic of ethnography, questions and areas of inquiry were added to address respondents' comments.

Photo editors were asked about the relationship between their department and the other departments in the newsroom and upper management. They were asked how well they were able to meet the goals of their department within the organizational structure. In addition, editors were asked to describe how well their photo staffs were able to perform their jobs within the work environment.

The *Dallas Morning News* was the largest newspaper visited for the study. The paper has a daily circulation of 600,000 and a Sunday circulation of 780,000. The paper is owned by Belo, a publicly traded media group. The full-time photography staff consisted of 36 photographers, 34 working in the downtown main office. There were 26 male photographers and 10 female photographers on staff who ranged in age from 24 to

56. The range of photojournalism experience of staff members was between three years and 35 years. The paper employed eight photo editors, of which two were part-time employees. None of the photo editors shot assignments on a routine basis, which was defined in the questionnaire as at least weekly.

The photo department of the *Dallas Morning News* was the most expansive and comprised more sections of the newsroom than the other departments visited for this study. The photo editors' desks and a light table were located in one area of the newsroom. A studio with an equipment room and a kitchen was in a separate area. Attached to the studio was an area where photographers could edit film on a light table. A darkroom was located in a separate area of this room. Film processing equipment was located in an open area across the hall from this room. Computer stations for scanning photos were located in another area of the same floor of the building. The large, darkened room had two sections of computer desks with film-scanning equipment. In another room, photographers had small tabletop desks and lockers.

During the research period, the department covered approximately 25 assignments a day. The assignment editor had access to the newspaper's daily story budgets on his computer. Individual assignments for photographers were scheduled in a book on the assignment editor's desk. Photographers averaged two to three assignments a day. The assignment editor considered the time needed to cover the type of assignment, time needed to travel between assignments and any long-term projects photographers were working on when making assignments.

The *Times-Picayune* is owned by Newhouse Newspapers, a family-owned, privately held media group. It has a daily circulation of 270,000 and a Sunday circulation of 300,000. The paper employed 19 full-time photographers, nine working in the main office. There were 16 male photographers and three female photographers ranging in age from 27 to 60. The range of photojournalism experience of the staff was between five years and 35 years. There were four full-time photo editors employed by the newspaper. One of the photo editors shot assignments on a routine basis.

The photo editors' desks were located in a section of the newsroom near the enclosed photography department. The director of photography also had an office in the photo department. The department was connected to the newsroom by an open doorway. Computers for photographers to scan and file photos were located in an open area of the department. A light table was located near the center of the department for photographers and editors to view film. Processing equipment was located in small rooms in the back of the department.

The photo staff covered approximately 15 assignments a day during the research visit. Photo editors had access to the newspaper's daily story budgets on their computers. Individual assignments for photographers were recorded in a book located on an assistant photo editor's desk. Photographers at the *Times-Picayune* were assigned an average of two to three assignments a day. Editors would not give a photographer more than four assignments to shoot in one day.

The *Albuquerque Journal* is owned by Journal Publishing Company, which is a family-owned, privately held newspaper group. It has a daily circulation of 90,000 and a

Sunday circulation of 140,000. The paper employed 13 full-time photographers, 11 working in the main office. There were 11 male photographers and two female photographers on staff. The photographers ranged in age from 27 to 65 and had between two and 40 years of photojournalism experience. There were three full-time photo editors on staff. All of the photo editors shot assignments on a routine basis.

The *Albuquerque Journal* had the only photo department separated from the main newsroom by a closed door. All desks and work areas were located in this area. There were no photo editing desks in the main newsroom. Computer stations with scanning equipment were located in the center of the room and along the back wall. The photo editor had an enclosed office at one side of the room. A room with processing equipment was located on the opposite side of the room. The studio was located in a room near the photo department.

During the research visit, the photography staff covered a total of approximately 12 assignments each day. Photographers at the *Albuquerque Journal* shot an average of two to three assignments a day. Individual photographer's assignments were scheduled in a book located on a counter in an open work area. The greatest number of assignments the photo editor would assign a photographer was four or five, depending on the types of assignments.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

The first research objective addressed how photo editors and photojournalists view routines in the workplace. The photo editors and photographers in this study followed numerous routines in their daily work. The routines appeared to be designed to allow photo department staffs to manage work flow efficiently and produce photographs that were acceptable by the newspaper's standards. Overall, similar systems of managing work flow were used at the three newspapers. The most prevalent issues for all of the photo editors were making efficient use of personnel and encouraging communication between staff photographers and the editors and reporters in the newsroom. Photo editing functions that varied among research sites, such as editing film and shooting assignments as a member of the staff, appeared to reflect different staffing needs within the departments.

The photographers in this study also followed routines to manage their daily work flow. Photographers were able to describe the types of images valued by newspaper management and methods for producing images that would meet these standards. However, photographers also employed techniques to avoid overusing these methods in their daily assignments. Photographers who had been with the newspapers for many years appeared more aware of routines. The photographers, especially those new to the staffs, relied heavily on the examples of their peers in learning department expectations. As a group, many struggled with work relationships within the organization.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to examine how photo editors and photographers believe they are able to attain their professional goals within the work environment of their news organizations. The study also explored ways in which organizational and social factors in the workplace may affect the images produced by newspaper photographers. The discussion of the findings is organized around each of the research objectives. Individual and group responses and behaviors observed are included in the discussion.

Workplace Routines

The first objective focused on previously identified routines in news and photojournalism. With the photo editors, observation and interviews for the research related to organizing the department, scheduling assignments, managing work flow and editing film. Photographers were asked questions related to how they approach assignments and how they keep their perspective fresh when covering mundane assignments. In addition, they were asked how the nature of the job and the work environment affected their ability to take good news photographs.

The organization of all three photo departments was similar with respect to tracking and scheduling assignments. Department editors had created photo assignment forms for reporters and newsroom editors to request photos for their sections. Each of the

photo editors mentioned redesigning the request form in an attempt to get more thorough information for photographers shooting the assignments.

Difficulty with incomplete assignments was mentioned by each of the editors. Information missing from assignments included complete address, contact information at an event and detailed information about the story that the photograph would accompany. Editors commented that this lack of information made photographers' jobs more difficult because they either had to take time to look up missing information or were not completely aware of the content of the story. The editors believed more effort on the part of those requesting the photographs would result in better pictures for the newspapers.

The upper management at the *Times-Picayune* wanted to have a story and photograph that had meaning together on the front page of each edition. The director of photography said he would like for reporters and photographers to cover assignments as a team to ensure the photographer had complete knowledge of the information that would be covered in the story and the angle from which the story would be told. He said other editors in the newsroom had not adopted the idea because they frequently expected the photographer to simply provide an illustration for the story.

The photo editor at the *Albuquerque Journal* said that photographs are often a last-minute thought at the paper. He wanted reporters to approach photographers more regularly to discuss the stories and possible photos to accompany them. He said reporters many times only wanted a photograph that reflected the story instead of adding meaning to it. He encouraged staff photographers to develop relationships with reporters and others in the newsroom to help produce better results. He said he felt strongly that the

photographers on his staff were journalists first and photographers second and encouraged them to view their job as such.

Each photo editing department accessed the daily budget on computer. They used this budget for making assignments and deciding those assignments that would most likely produce the front page or main art for each section. At least one photo editor attended the budget meetings and received information and clarification on which assignments needed photographs and, of those, which were considered most important. These meetings also gave editors a chance to mention any spot news or additional feature photos that had been shot by members of the photo staff and to discuss the strengths or weaknesses of the photographs.

All of the photo editors tracked individual photographer's assignments in a paper scheduling book. One editor commented that this form of tracking assignments had an advantage over using a computer, because he was able to see all of the day's activities at a glance. These books were kept in an open space in or near the photo editing area so other editors and photographers could see the day's schedule.

The editors all said that the preferences of the photographers were a strong factor in scheduling photographers' assignments. The assignment editor for the *Dallas Morning News* believed that when photographers have an interest in the assignment or subject, they do a better job. He said his second goal was to give variety in the types of assignments they received to "keep the photographers fresh." The assistant photo editor responsible for making most of the daily assignments at the *Times-Picayune* said she

tried to give photographers an equal amount to do and assign them to the types of assignments they were best at and most enjoyed shooting.

However, necessity sometimes interfered with this. “Probably the most difficult problem situation for editors is when there are too many assignments for the number of photographers,” the *Dallas Morning News* assignment editor said. He sometimes made assignments based on who was available and tried to avoid making photographers spend too much time driving from assignment to assignment. He said many photographers in the department created photo stories, which they worked on over an extended period of time. This required time away from daily assignments. Others, however, spent most of their time covering typical daily assignments because they did not care about shooting story assignments or it was not their strongest subject area.

Balancing available staff and other resources with the demand for photo coverage consumed much of the photo editors’ time. Last-minute requests were not unusual for the photo departments. On a Thursday night, nine assignments were scheduled for the following day at the *Times-Picayune*. Throughout the day Friday, seven more assignments were added to the schedule. Of those, half were spot news and could not be planned for in advance. The others were requests from reporters and newsroom editors. The photo editor said when reporters and editors made these types of assignments, they usually needed to be shot immediately, making planning even more difficult.

During the research visits, problems arose at both the *Times-Picayune* and the *Dallas Morning News* because there were too few staff members to cover the number of assignments. In these cases, editors either called freelance photographers that they

regularly used or checked to see if photos could be picked up from The Associated Press. To cover an area college basketball game would require an entire shift for a *Times-Picayune* photographer. By calling a newspaper in Baton Rouge to see if someone there was shooting the game and if they could place a photo from the game on the AP wire, the photo editor was able to make a photographer available to cover another area basketball game occurring on the same day. On another day, the photo editor had three photo requests for one evening and only one available staff photographer. She called a freelance photographer to help cover the assignments.

During a budget meeting at the *Dallas Morning News*, staff members responsible for the paper's visuals, including photographs and graphics, discussed sending a photographer to cover grass fires in Oklahoma. The assignment editor and photo editor attending the meeting said they had seven photographers absent from work and would review the day's assignments to see whom they might be able to send. To make a staff member available to travel to Oklahoma, they would need to evaluate which of the day's photo requests were "must haves" and what other photos might be available from the AP wire.

The extent to which photo editors were involved in selecting the pictures that would be used from photographers' film varied. The director of photography at the *Times-Picayune* said he did not have enough editors to look at everything at all times. For assignments that were more complex than the typical daily assignments and those assignments that were potentially controversial, an editor would request to see the film before a negative was selected and scanned. The photo editor at the *Albuquerque Journal*

believed that his staff members edited well on their own and did not routinely request to see photographers' film.

Unlike the other papers visited, photo editors at the *Dallas Morning News* reviewed all photographers' film and selected what they believed to be the best shot. While photographers could suggest which image they believed was best, the editors made the final selection. This procedure was followed even by the most veteran members of the staff for routine assignments, such as a press conference. When one photographer observed for the study transmitted digital images from a baseball game, he submitted two photographs. He then called the editor to express which shot he believed was most relevant to the event.

Photo editors commented that pagination of newspaper pages and the increasing number of graphic designers on staff have added constraints concerning how pictures can be used in the newspaper. An assistant photo editor at the *Times-Picayune* said use of photos on news pages was limited because the pages had to conform to a certain style. Designers had more freedom to change the layout for the travel, food and other feature-oriented sections. At the *Albuquerque Journal*, however, an assistant photo editor said the design for feature sections usually was set in advance and there was little room for creativity when the photographer took the pictures.

The *Albuquerque Journal* photo editor said design was treated as an element of content now. "It can enhance the content, but sometimes it seems to drive the boat," he said. His photographers were asked to "shoot for shape" with increasing frequency, he commented. An assistant photo editor at the *Albuquerque Journal* added that pagination

and increased design capabilities have caused difficulties because they add another layer of communication to the process of newspaper production.

Photo editors were responsible for many other aspects of the operation of the photo departments. These responsibilities ranged from answering phone calls to determining and maintaining the overall visual standards for the newspaper. In addition to daily duties, photo editors hired new staff members, made decisions about the purchasing of new equipment, selected training and workshop events for staff members to attend and maintained morale in the department. The *Albuquerque Journal* was the only newspaper visited that required photo editors to shoot assignments. The photo editor said he would not ask any of his staff members to do anything he wouldn't do, so he believed he should still shoot assignments at least one day each week. The assistant photo editors on the staff were available for assignments daily. The only editor to shoot assignments at the other newspapers visited was an assistant photo editor who worked exclusively in a bureau for the *Times-Picayune*.

The photo editor for the *Albuquerque Journal* said his main role had developed into being a liaison between the editors and reporters making photo requests and the photographers. An assistant photo editor at the *Times-Picayune* considered her main responsibilities organizing the people and organizing the product. She said it was easy to become consumed with trying to make effective use of the staff and take care of other business on the photo desk. "You have to remind yourself that the priority is good photojournalism," she stated.

Veteran news photographers commented that their role within the news organization had changed dramatically during the last 15 to 20 years. One photographer, who had worked for the *Dallas Morning News* for 28 years, said when he first started working at the paper there were three types of photos—weather, children and pets. “The photographs now not only have to look good, but also have to connect with the content,” he said.

Today, newspaper photographers shoot a much wider range of assignments and are expected to take a greater role as journalists. They may be asked to research and shoot story assignments that take months to photograph and require them to travel around the world. Photographers are expected to work as a team with editors, designers, illustrators and stylists on many feature assignments. In addition, they also must understand the operations and goals of the news organization.

Even with the changes, photographers face challenges in repeatedly shooting the same types of assignments and being responsible for capturing visually interesting images from these situations. Photographers at the newspapers studied were aware of the types of images they were expected to produce. They knew individual editor’s style preferences and the types of images that were valued within the department. Many photographers also were aware of the kinds of photographic coverage appreciated by upper management.

All photographers responded that they had a tendency to follow routines when composing and shooting assignments. One photographer commented that the less time he had to shoot an assignment, the more likely he was to follow “the formula.” Another said

that early in his career, he approached assignments with excitement, wanting to capture the moment and to do it well. He admitted now he may miss opportunities on certain assignments because he had been in those situations many times before. He said he often edited “in his head” when he was shooting and sometimes was looking for just one shot.

Other photographers followed the pattern of visualizing images before arriving at an assignment. “A lot of times I try to previsualize the picture and previsualize the emotions as well,” a photographer commented. Several photographers said that once they reached a point in their careers where they believed they were technically proficient, they spent less time assessing situations when photographing. “Some things you think about without realizing you’re thinking about them,” one photographer said.

Photographers also drew on their experiences to develop strategies for capturing the best possible image from events. During the research, a photographer was observed while photographing a baseball game at which a player was expected to reach a batting milestone. Before the game, photographers from other area newspapers and wire services discussed the angles they believed would be the best from which to shoot. They discussed lens selection and the number and types of images they could get from the bases to determine the best location to stand.

When shooting assignments, photographers know what images they can record that will adequately represent the event or subject and will be accepted by newsroom staff and editors. A photographer for the *Albuquerque Journal* said editors were unlikely to use evocative pictures. “They prefer straightforward pictures,” she said. “If a photographer makes use of depth of field, they will not use the photo.” She noted that the

editors at the newspaper also favored close-up pictures to those shot with a wide-angle lens. She said she understood their preference for clean images, but that it limited how the photographers could work. Another photographer at the paper commented that the sections of the paper were so formatted that he knew what newsroom staff would want before even shooting an assignment. “There’s a formula of how much is going to be used,” he said.

A *Dallas Morning News* photographer said the newspaper promoted a certain look in its photographs. He said there was a preference for “funky, fresh” images that would cause the viewer to linger in the photograph’s elements. While some individuality can be seen in the shooting styles of staff members, he said it is subtle. “Editors let it be known that those images are appreciated,” he commented. “You either hear things when you’ve done well, or you hear nothing at all.”

A photographer at the *Times-Picayune* said knowing where and how certain regular feature assignments would run in the paper sometimes affected how he approached an assignment. “I never go in the door thinking this is going to be garbage,” he said. However, if he knew a photograph would run small on an inside page, he might not put as much effort into the assignment. After shooting an assignment that would accompany a regular music feature, he said there were some ideas he decided not to pursue and he did not devote more time to the assignment because the picture would not be used as dominant art in the page layout.

Photographers described several practices they used to aid in maintaining their creativity when approaching routine situations and events. A photographer who had

worked for the *Times-Picayune* for 17 years said he did not allow himself to take the “sure thing” shot, forcing him to work harder to find a new way to photograph the subject. Another photographer said she avoided falling into a routine by giving herself challenges. She sometimes shot an entire assignment with a lens she would normally never consider using in that situation.

Photographers also found ways to keep their passion for photography outside of the constraints of the newspapers. One photographer said she looked for elements she did not find in her work environment by reading books about photography and pursuing personal photography, such as simply taking pictures of her cats. Another photographer said he combated the stresses of the job, such as covering crimes and funerals, by being involved in the community. He found inspiration in sharing his reasons for becoming a photographer and the realities of the profession by making presentations at schools and mentoring students.

Other photographers found places to display their work outside of the newspaper. A photographer said he had returned to his roots in photography—black and white portraits—to rediscover his passion for the medium. He was working on a series of portraits for an art show. Another photographer was commissioned to take photographs for a public exhibit. He said the project was fulfilling because it allowed him to shoot pictures in a manner that would never run in the paper.

Photographers described several sources for learning new techniques and better ways to perform their jobs. The most common method was to observe and ask questions of fellow staff members. A *Times-Picayune* photographer said the main office had a

family atmosphere, where one could hover and ask questions. He said the director of photography had assigned photographers to serve as mentors to younger staff members in the past. Photographers at two of the newspapers said an increase in the diversity of the staff, in both demographic makeup and talent, helped generate ideas.

One photographer interviewed had joined the photo staff three months earlier after working briefly at a suburban newspaper. He had no educational background in journalism or photography and decided to pursue photojournalism because he enjoyed taking pictures. “The only way you can learn about this job is to be around people who know how to do it,” he said. “It’s a teaching staff, if you don’t mind constructive criticism,” he said of the newspaper’s photographers and editors. “They’ll tell you, because it’s a reflection of them.”

To learn the journalism aspects of the job, he said he watched how the other photographers worked. “If you don’t understand the business, you wonder sometimes why they shot that,” he said. He also looked at pictures in the newspaper, then read the cutlines to learn how photographers would communicate with their photographs. He said when he first started at the newspaper he would try things, then was told later that he wasn’t allowed to do them. “At first I was terrified by the fact you can’t stage things,” he said. “The hardest thing for me is not knowing the business.”

Photo staffs have to make adjustments for new technology as well. A *Dallas Morning News* photographer said that the staff was “somewhat caught in the constraints of new media.” He believed once staff members became comfortable with things such as new digital equipment and new methods of archiving film, there would be a resurgence in

creativity. “You are confined by the technology growth, but you are also freed by it,” he said. “Writing the captions takes longer than scanning the photos now.”

The photo editor at the *Albuquerque Journal* was in the process of switching all photographers to digital cameras. Some photographers were not enthusiastic about completely abandoning shooting film. A photographer at the *Times-Picayune* said he would like to see processes in his photo department streamlined by new technology. He would like photographers to be able to receive assignments at home by e-mail and transmit from the road. This would allow more time to spend at assignments. “Our job is not in the lab anymore,” he said.

Photographers mentioned several typical situations inside the news organizations that impacted their ability to perform their jobs. “You have some reporters who don’t think photos exist,” one photographer said. Another said reporters sometimes have a bad habit of telling photographers how to shoot pictures. Others mentioned being asked to cover assignments on short notice because a reporter forgot to fill out a request form and having to take time to find information newsroom staff have omitted from request forms.

Some photographers mentioned personal conflicts among staff members. “When working with others and going to meetings, there can be personality conflicts, usually individual,” a photographer said. “Naturally, you work better with some people than others.” The only complaint one photographer said he had about his work environment was that other staff members got angry, became rude and moody, or did not talk to other photographers. “If you are bitter and jaded, then you should step aside,” another

photographer said. “Too many people want jobs, and those who are constantly unhappy affect the mood of the overall staff.”

News Organizations

Photo editors and photographers were interviewed to examine how they believed the news organization supported or restrained their professional goals. Photo editors were asked about their relationships with upper management and the parameters of their decision-making authority. Photographers were interviewed about their relationships with others in the newsroom and the professional opportunities at the newspapers. They were also asked if they had the opportunity to pursue their photojournalism interests at the newspaper.

The assignment editor at the *Dallas Morning News* said he enjoyed working at the newspaper because he believed the photo department was well organized compared with other places he had worked. He said it was a “photo paper.” The photo department had the power to make decisions regarding the staff, direction of the department and the use of photographs. He also commented that the paper made good use of photographs in its design. He said the department had a strong reputation for excellence and the staff won many awards, which helped support its autonomy.

Several *Dallas Morning News* photographers said they enjoyed the fact that management allowed photographers to pursue their own story ideas. They were expected to research their ideas, create a budget for the project and present the idea to editors. Although the project ideas sometimes were rejected because of budget limitations, the photographers valued the opportunity to seek long-term assignment opportunities. One

photographer commented, however, that the size of the staff and the level of experience of the photographers sometimes made getting coveted assignments more difficult. He said he lobbied editors for the opportunity to be one of the photographers selected to cover the Olympic games, but couldn't compete with the photographers ultimately selected for the assignment.

One photographer said the most difficult aspect of the job was that work schedules could change quickly. Sometimes photographers were expected to travel at a moment's notice. He said it was easy to become consumed with the job. Photo editors were good at balancing individual workloads, he said. However, when it was necessary for him to work hard and make sacrifices in his personal life, he sometimes wondered if anyone actually enjoyed the products of his work.

Some photographers appreciated working for a news organization large enough to provide other job positions. One photographer said that, although he didn't have aspirations to seek another position in the photo department, he believed there were many opportunities within the company. Another said because staff photographers could pursue photo editing positions, it provided him more options in the future if he wanted to have steadier work hours.

The director of photography at the *Times-Picayune* said photography comes to the forefront at newspapers that regard the medium as an editorial reporter. He said the department received support because his managers believed photographs and graphics were just as important as words. The publisher liked the staff to cover society photos, which were the director's least favorite thing to cover, but he considered it a trade-off

because he also had the publisher's support in sending photographers around the world to cover stories.

The director of photography said he was on equal footing with everyone else on staff. He said he had the authority to hold a reporter's story if the photographer believed he or she had not had adequate time to get the best pictures. He believed the photo department had autonomy because staff members had built trust by being competent and able to think for themselves.

He believed one of the best things a photo editor could do was shut up. He wanted staff members to generate their own ideas. "If you give too much input, you may stifle creativity," he said. Providing an understanding of the subject was the most important goal, not predetermined notions of reporters and editors, he said. There often are not enough good assignments to go around, he noted. Usually travel assignments are considered the best. Some photographers would travel anywhere at any time, but others preferred not to because of family or other obligations.

Photographers said the photo director stood behind the photo staff in the newsroom and did not tell them what to do. They said there was still a commitment on the part of the newspaper to give photographers long-term assignments, even though the news hole was shrinking. "If I have a good story to work on, they cut me loose," one photographer said. "It happens much more than not."

After three months of working on a series about the condition of fisheries around the world, the photographer working on the project was not satisfied with the results. Managers gave him three additional months. Eventually, he was granted 13 months to

complete the project to his satisfaction. The *Times-Picayune* management was generous about providing resources and did not hassle him about the time it took to finish the project, he said. He was later awarded a Pulitzer Prize for the series.

Other photographers at the paper agreed that the director of photography and upper management were supportive of their goals. One photographer said he developed an interest in photo illustrations. “I’ve found this other area that I’m personally fascinated by,” he said. “The paper has been tremendously supportive.” At times, the photo editors took him off the daily schedule for up to three weeks to work on a series of illustrations. He believed that his job satisfaction would remain high as long as he could keep the balance between what he really enjoyed and routine daily assignments.

For many of the photographers at the newspaper, long-term feature-oriented assignments were a favorite. “A good assignment is visual and important in a social kind of way,” a photographer said. “It is important that it has the potential to change someone’s life for the better.”

The photo editor at the *Albuquerque Journal* believed photographers had no less decision-making power than reporters at the newspaper. He said he did feel a need to educate reporters and editors by “putting things on their level.” He gave an example of a basketball photo that ran small in the paper that day. He told the editor that using a sports action photograph that small would be like sending a reporter on an assignment, then having him or her write a brief.

Several of the photographers believed newsroom editors at the newspaper treated photographs as accessories. They said editors and reporters did not encourage ideas from

them. “I have pitched several story ideas and have gotten no response,” one photographer said. “It’s sort of a hassle for them, which I think is too bad.” One photographer commented that some staff members were discouraged because they thought the paper would not run their work or would not run it well. “Seeing pictures run small or poorly does affect attitude and discourages people,” he said.

Another photographer said it was frustrating because the managing editor and publisher were so close by in the newsroom, but they never walked into the department to tell anyone he or she had done a good job. He believed that if the managing editor or publisher had a design background, then photos would be used more prominently in the newspaper. He said environmental portraits sometimes became mug shots to make more room for stories. “The reader loses information that way,” he said.

Photographers also said they wished reporters would work more closely with them on assignments. “Many times the reporter can do his or her job on the phone, and he or she doesn’t know what it takes to illustrate the story,” a photographer said. “If the photographer comes back with something that the reporter and editor don’t feel works well, then it is a waste of time and money.” Another photographer commented that reporters often told photographers exactly what they wanted and how to shoot the picture. “I managed to keep my job for 15 years without reporters telling me what to do,” he said. “I have a journalism degree, too.”

Within the constraints of the news organization, many photographers’ primary goal remains communicating through images. Photographers described their ideal assignments as those that gave them a chance to connect with the reader. Human-interest

stories were often an eye-opener for one photographer. Another photographer said she most enjoyed covering social issues. “What I think is powerful is to tell one person’s story,” she said.

Quality of Work

Observations and interviews related to the third objective focused on discovering the criteria newspaper photographers used when assessing the quality of their work. Photographers described the types of feedback they received from inside and outside the news organization. Photographers also were asked whose opinions they most value when critiquing their work and where they looked to find work to compare with their own.

Several photographers from each of the newspapers said they relied on reader responses to gauge the quality of their work. “If you can get any kind of feedback from readers, that’s what makes it worthwhile,” one photographer said. Another photographer mentioned that when he gets letters or calls, it makes him feel good. “I think a lot of people don’t realize how much work it is,” he said. He liked audience feedback, but did not feel he received enough. Some photographers felt a connection with readers and thought they received adequate response, while others said they heard from readers much less now.

Photographers also mentioned their peers’ work when attempting to set a benchmark for quality. Photographers at all the newspapers frequently asked the opinions of other photographers nearby when editing and scanning film. They often made their frame selections based on the responses of other photographers. One photographer mentioned a local “photographers’ night” where photographers gathered and showed

their work. One photographer said he believed a good editor was invaluable. Another also said he seemed evaluate his progress based on the desires of his editors.

Competition among staff members was mentioned as a method of receiving feedback and analyzing work. “You can feel a great sense of elation when you do something good, or the opposite when the opposite happens,” a photographer said. Ego plays a role, another photographer commented. He said the photo editor placed pictures he thought were outstanding on a bulletin board and circled the credit line. At another paper, photographers turned in a favorite picture, then he or she would have an opportunity to talk about it during a staff meeting.

Photographers also mentioned looking at photographers’ work from other newspapers and in the monthly NPPA magazine. “It’s certainly good work and a source of inspiration,” one photographer said. Others mentioned attending workshops and NPPA Flying Short courses to get ideas about how other photographers covered assignments.

One photographer said he most valued the opinion of his wife. “She looks at it from a purely communicative value,” he said. Photographers often reacted to his photo stories by asking how he got a certain shot, interesting light or a great angle. “They see it based on a journalistic point of view,” he said, “things they know are a challenge.”

Some photographers spoke about immeasurable qualities that indicated professional success. One photographer said the most significant feedback was not receiving recognition, but taking photographs that were meaningful to the subject. Others said their greatest accomplishments came from making a difference in someone’s life or changing people’s living conditions for the better.

Photojournalism Contests

Many photographers said they participated in the monthly and annual NPPA contests, the Pictures of the Year competition and the Pulitzer Prize awards. These contests are among many newspaper photographers may participate in. Photographers were quick to point out the subjectivity of these contests. However, photo editors and photographers frequently mention awards in describing their best work and the work of others.

Several of the photographers said contests were a way to gauge their success. “It’s the barometer, but it’s also subjective,” one photographer said. “Contests are a valid judge, but if you rely on that solely, it’ll depress you,” another said. Often what he considered his best work did not win in contests, he said. One photographer said that because he received little response from readers, he viewed contests as his primary form of feedback from people outside the newsroom. Many of the photographers said reviewing their monthly and annual newspaper clippings when selecting work to enter provided an opportunity to assess their professional progress.

Times-Picayune and *Dallas Morning News* editors encouraged photographers’ involvement in contests. The director of photography at the *Times-Picayune* said he encouraged photographers to participate in contests by having management pay for photographers’ NPPA dues. To have their dues paid by the newspaper, photographers were required to enter at least one photograph in the Pictures of the Year contest.

“We’re pretty awards conscious,” one *Dallas Morning News* photographer said. “There’s a lot of emphasis put on awards. I guess management likes it.” The director of

photography at the *Times-Picayune* said the Pulitzer Prize seems to be the only award that means anything to “word people.” Even so, he sent announcements to the publisher to promote all photographers’ contest accomplishments. A photographer at the *Albuquerque Journal* said more staff photographers would probably participate in the NPPA contests if the paper would pay their dues. She said she pays her own dues, because participating is a priority for her.

A photographer who received the Pulitzer Prize said the award made a difference in his career. He now is invited to speak to organizations, which he enjoys. He said he expected more of himself and others expected more of him after he received the prize, but he still gets the same kinds of assignments as before. He said when he won, a colleague called and talked to him at length about how it would change his life. He said it was good to have that support, because handling the reactions would have been difficult without it.

Some of the photographers said contests were so subjective that they really didn’t influence how they viewed the quality of their work. However, photographers’ behavior sometimes differed from what they said. Two of the research visits were conducted near the time of annual contest deadlines. Many photographers and editors talked in the department about the contests and the pictures that would be entered.

One photographer said he did not believe in contests, and he now focused on evaluating his own work. However, he later said he recently entered three photographs in the Pictures of the Year contest. He was more selective of the entries this time, he said. He believed they were “sure winners.” Other photographers who said they did not use

contests to judge the quality of their work also mentioned winning awards and contests when discussing what they believed to be their most significant work.

CHAPTER 6

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

The purpose of this study was to identify organizational and professional norms that affect photojournalists and the images they produce. Through exploring the routines employed by photo editors and photographers when performing their jobs and their criteria for assessing the quality of their work, this study provides a better understanding of how news photographs become constructed symbolic objects. The research of media sociologists applying the social constructionist views of society and the organizational theoretical perspective to systems and values of other areas of news production provided a framework for analyzing these influences.

The findings of this study show that photojournalists, similar to other members of news organizations, perform their jobs in a dynamic and complex work environment. The structure of the departments in which they work is designed to use resources efficiently and minimize instability in planning and producing a daily newspaper. Photojournalists are socialized into the system through the influences and actions of editors, peers and professional organizations. In this environment, they learn procedures and values that allow them to meet professional and organizational standards.

The nature of the business and the interrelated activities of newspaper employees, however, complicate photojournalists' ability to perform their jobs and meet their professional goals. While photographers at some newspapers are gaining respect, they still struggle to be considered equal with other journalists in the newsroom. The

constraints of the news organization also limit photojournalists' ability to pursue their professional goals, including communicating effectively through photographs.

The ethnographic research methods used for this study are designed as a tool of discovery. The information provided by photo editors and photographers and observed during the study suggests areas for further research. The findings revealed that the environment in which photojournalists perform their jobs influences their values and the photographs they produce. In-depth ethnographic research focusing on individual influences may help identify additional characteristics. Of particular interest is the extent to which the opinions of peers in the photo department and in professional organizations influence photojournalists' values. R. Smith Schuneman (1972) observed, "Photojournalists are unique in the field of mass communication because they have a natural urge to associate, to discuss each other's work and to see what one another is doing" (p. 149). This quality may be responsible for significant standardization of content and aesthetic qualities in newspaper photography.

The findings also suggest areas in which quantitative research techniques could be used to better define influences and opinions. Studies of this type might include evaluating news photographers' goals and measuring the extent to which selected organizational norms affect newspapers' visual content. A survey of upper management's view of the role of photojournalists and photojournalism within the newspaper also could provide useful information for photo department managers.

During the interviews for this study, several photographers said that journalism schools do a disservice to students by not teaching them the realities of the profession.

These photographers believed students entering the field should be provided better information about what newspaper photography is like as a long-term career. They spoke of disappointment when learning that the majority of their time is spent photographing routine daily assignments at the newspaper, after focusing on photographic essays in journalism classes. They also mentioned the limited opportunities for advancement in newspaper photography when seeking a career path. Greater understanding of these issues could be useful for both practicing photojournalists and educators.

Journalism has been called a rough draft of history. The perceived veracity of photographic images makes photojournalism a significant component of mass communication and the construction of social meaning. Like other newsroom employees, photojournalists' work is affected by the complex culture of the news organization. Peers and professional networks also impact the photojournalists' decisions when selecting and evaluating photographs. Better understanding of the influences of the news organization and professional socialization on photo editors and photojournalists may lead to greater knowledge about how visual reality is constructed and communicated.

APPENDIX A
INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Photo Editors

- What are your job responsibilities?
- Do you attend daily budget meetings? What are your responsibilities in these meetings?
- How do you handle accepting photo requests and scheduling photographers for assignments?
- Do you edit staff members' film from all assignments? Under what circumstances would you request to see a photographer's negatives?
- What are the most difficult aspects of your job?
- What is the relationship between your department and other departments in the newsroom? How do you think upper management views the role of the department?
- Do you believe you have enough decision-making authority to manage the department the way you would like?

Photographers

- How do you define a quality news photograph?
- How do you decide if you have taken a "great" shot on an assignment?
- What types of feedback do you receive about your photographs? Whose opinions do you most value?
- What do the editors look for when reviewing your film? What types of images do you believe are most valuable to them?
- How do you stay fresh in your perspective when covering typical daily assignments?
- What type of assignment would be your dream assignment?

- How would you describe the use of photographs in your newspaper? How do you think upper management views the role of photographs in the newspaper?
- How would you describe the ideal working conditions for a newspaper photographer?
- What are your goals as a photojournalist?
- What conditions do you expect to find at this assignment?
- What pictures did you consider taking, but decided not to take? Why?
- To what extent do you consider the audience when shooting assignments?

APPENDIX B
QUESTIONNAIRE

QUESTIONNAIRE

Newspaper Information

Name of newspaper	<u>The DALLAS MORNING NEWS</u>
Type of newspaper ownership (e.g., family; newspaper chain)	<u>NEWSPAPER CHAIN</u>
What is the circulation of your newspaper?	Weekday <u>600,000</u> Sunday <u>780,000</u>

Photography Information

How many full-time photographers are on your staff?	<u>36</u>
How many full-time staff photographers work in your downtown or main office?	<u>34</u>
How many full-time staff photographers work in bureaus?	<u>2</u>
How many full-time staff photographers are male? female?	Male <u>26</u> Female <u>10</u>
What is the age range of the photographers on your staff?	<u>24</u> years to <u>56</u> years
What is the range of professional experience of your staff members?	<u>3</u> years to <u>35</u> years

Editing Information

How many photo editors are on your staff?	Full time <u>6</u> Part time <u>2</u>
Do any photo editors also shoot on a routine basis (at least weekly)?	<u> </u> Yes <u>NO</u> No If yes, how many? <u> </u>

QUESTIONNAIRE

Newspaper Information

Name of newspaper The Times-Picayune

Type of newspaper ownership
(e.g., family; newspaper chain) Family (Newhouse)

What is the circulation of your newspaper?

Weekday	<u>270,000</u>
Sunday	<u>300,000</u>

Photography Information

How many full-time photographers are on your staff? 19

How many full-time staff photographers work in your downtown or main office? 9

How many full-time staff photographers work in bureaus? 10

How many full-time staff photographers are male? female?

Male	<u>16</u>
Female	<u>3</u>

What is the age range of the photographers on your staff? 27 years to 60 years

What is the range of professional experience of your staff members? 5 years to 35 years

Editing Information

How many photo editors are on your staff?

Full time	<u>4, including myself</u>
Part time	<u> </u>

Do any photo editors also shoot on a routine basis (at least weekly)? XX Yes No

If yes, how many? 1

QUESTIONNAIRE

Newspaper Information

Name of newspaper Albuquerque Journal

Type of newspaper ownership
(e.g., family; newspaper chain) Family

What is the circulation of your newspaper?

Weekday	<u>90,000</u>
Sunday	<u>140,000</u>

Photography Information

How many full-time photographers are on your staff? 13

How many full-time staff photographers work in your downtown or main office? 11

How many full-time staff photographers work in bureaus? 2

How many full-time staff photographers are male? female?

Male	<u>11</u>
Female	<u>2</u>

What is the age range of the photographers on your staff? 27 years to 65 years

What is the range of professional experience of your staff members? 2 years to 40 years

Editing Information

How many photo editors are on your staff?

Full time	<u>3</u>
Part time	<u> </u>

Do any photo editors also shoot on a routine basis (at least weekly)? X Yes No

If yes, how many? 3

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